

Community resources

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Viewing cable 09QUITO15, WHITHER CORREA: A SHIFT FURTHER LEFT

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the structure of a cable as well as how to discuss them with others. See also the FAQs

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables (browse by origin to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this WikiSource article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags #cablegate and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. #09QUITO15.

Reference ID Created Released Classification Origin
09QUITO15 2009-01-14 00:18 2011-08-30 01:44 SECRET//NOFORN Embassy Quito

Appears in these articles:

http://www.eluniverso.com/2011/04/12/1/1355/cable-186986.html

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VZCZCXYZ0008
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0015/01 0140018
ZNY SSSSS ZZH(CCY AD1B8B49 MSI7873-695)
O 140018Z JAN 09 ZDS
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9851
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 7912
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 4066
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3335
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JAN LIMA 2976
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0155
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4021
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0041
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 0025
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0171

id: 186986
date: 1/14/2009 0:18
refid: 09QUITO15
origin: Embassy Quito
classification: SECRET//NOFORN
destination: 08QUITO1047|08QUITO1115|08QUITO1128|08QUITO1145|08QUITO1146|08QUITO1162|08QUITO327|08QUITO442|08QUITO723|08QUITO963|09QUITO1|09QUI
header:
VZCZCXYZ0008
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0015/01 0140018
ZNY SSSSS ZZH(CCY AD1B8B49 MSI7873-695)
O 140018Z JAN 09 ZDS
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9851
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 7912
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 4066
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RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 0025
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0171

----- header ends -----

S E C R E T QUITO 000015

NOFORN
SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CHANGE IN CLASSIFICATION)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/13/2034
TAGS: PREL EFIN PGOV SNAR MARR E AID EC VE CU IR
RS, CO
SUBJECT: WHITHER CORREA: A SHIFT FURTHER LEFT

REF: A. QUITO 10
1B. 08 QUITO 963
1C. 08 QUITO 1115
1D. 08 QUITO 1145
1E. 08 QUITO 1146
1F. 08 QUITO 1162
1G. 08 QUITO 1128
1H. QUITO 01
1I. 08 QUITO 327
1J. 08 QUITO 442
1K. 08 QUITO 723
1L. 08 QUITO 1047
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Classified By: Ambassador Heather Hodges for reason 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary: President Correa's rhetoric and actions in the last two months have veered off the pattern we witnessed during much of his earlier presidency. A harder left orientation is evidenced by his trips to Iran and Cuba, debt default, and sharp attacks on the U.S. In the past, while conceding enough to keep his far-left political bases happy, he acted pragmatically more often than not, and aside from the aftermath of the March 1 Colombian incursion only occasionally criticized the U.S. The reasons behind this

shift remain murky. We are advising the GOE of the consequences of its actions (Ref A). End Summary.

LURCH TO THE LEFT

¶2. (C) Over the past two months, Correa has taken an increasingly leftist, anti-American posture, apparently unconcerned that his actions would result in frayed ties with the United States:

-- Last week in Havana, Correa demanded that the "Empire" end its blockade (sic) of Cuba, calling U.S. policy absurd. He accused the "Empire" of ethnocide (apparently meaning destruction of a people's culture) and criticized the "perverse injustice" inflicted upon the five Cuban spies imprisoned in the U.S. Correa declared himself an unconditional ally of Cuba. He commended the Cuban revolution's achievements, claiming it had succeeded in ensuring human rights for all Cubans. He called for an Organization of Latin American States that would include Cuba and exclude the U.S. Ecuador and Cuba signed nine cooperation agreements in the areas of science and technology, health, education, and culture, among others.

-- Correa closed out 2008 by inviting the ambassadors of Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Iran, China and Russia for a December 30 New Year's luncheon, a slap in the face for the rest of the diplomatic corps.

-- The President's office continued to defer the Ambassador's request for a meeting, which Correa had agreed to when she presented credentials on October 2 (Ref B). Two close presidential advisors promised to arrange such a meeting for December (Ref C), but it has still not transpired.

-- Changes at the Foreign Ministry are expected to make it more ideological. Correa appointed Proud and Sovereign Fatherland (PAIS) movement co-founder Fander Falconi as Foreign Minister December 15 (Ref D), saying the Government had been naive to focus on commercial and not geopolitical matters. The Legislative Commission is likely to approve an Executive-proposed bill that would allow political appointees below the ministerial level in the MFA, including as Vice Minister, Under Secretaries, and Directors General. Correa defended this move, "We want to politicize the foreign service in the positive sense, meaning that it reflect the foreign policy of a democratically-elected government."

-- Correa decided to default on part of the country's commercial debt on December 13 (Ref E).

-- During his December 5-9 trip to Iran, Correa railed against U.S. imperialism and condemned IAEA and UN Security Council policies and resolutions related to Iran (Ref F). He has approved Iran establishing a fully accredited Iranian embassy in Quito.

-- The GOE welcomed Russian FM Lavrov on November 27, discussing trade and military cooperation.

-- Correa aligned Ecuador more closely with the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) by attending its meeting in Venezuela on November 26, although still without becoming a full member. He sought and obtained the group's support for Ecuador's position on foreign debt. (In parallel, he also sought support from more moderate governments in the region.)

¶3. (C) We see only a few items on the positive side of the ledger in the past two months. The most notable was that Ecuador hosted a cordial and constructive first Bilateral Dialogue meeting on November 24 (Ref G). In addition, the MFA responded positively on December 30 to our diplomatic note on Military Group activities during 2009. In regard to U.S. investment, the GOE paid an arbitral award to Duke Energy on December 16 (Ref H) and is close to making payment to Machala Power, in which case Machala Power would lift its arbitration case (septel). Although not a new development, it is also worth noting that USAID, DEA and most other USG programs continue unimpeded.

AN EARLIER ROUND OF ANTI-AMERICANISM

¶4. (C) The U.S. first moved into Correa's crosshairs after Washington defended Colombia's March 1, 2008 incursion into Ecuador, which prompted Correa to allege participation by the United States and make his first call for an Organization of Latin American States. The low point of the period was in early April 2008 when Correa charged that the CIA had taken over Ecuadorian intelligence services and suggested the CIA might be out to kill him (Ref I).

¶5. (S/NF) During the summer and early fall of 2008, the GOE's actions were mixed, giving us hope that the fallout from the Colombian incursion did not signal a permanent shift further to the left and against the U.S. Among the encouraging developments was that Correa largely retreated from harshly criticizing us; his Saturday radio addresses from June to August 2008 contained more positive or neutral references to the U.S. than negative ones. He allowed bilateral cooperation to continue in all areas except intelligence. Correa accepted USAID's recommendation on ten economic sectors to target for investment (Ref J). He instructed FM Salvador to sign the Letter of Agreement with the U.S. on Narcotics Affairs Section programs. (Unfortunately, the GOE did not notify us of its decision by September 30, and we are still waiting for the funding to be reassigned back to us.) In this context, we were willing to accept that the two-month delay in Correa receiving the Ambassador's credentials was due to his hectic campaign schedule; at least she was able to present them to the President, rather than being asked to present credentials to the Vice President as many other Ambassadors had.

¶6. (C) There were a couple of worrisome events during the summer and early fall as well. Although Correa's intent was clear, we were surprised by the undiplomatic delivery of the diplomatic note informing us that Ecuador would not renew the Forward Operating Location agreement when it expired (Ref K), and FM Salvador's anti-U.S. comments at the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Tehran. The GOE's intelligence commission report, released on October 30, called the March 1 Colombian action a joint operation with the United States and repeated allegations about involvement by a FOL plane (Ref L).

THE CORREA WE THOUGHT WE KNEW

17. (C) What we hoped for during the summer and early fall of 2008 was the return of the pattern we witnessed during Correa's first year in office. In 2007, Correa's government had continued) and even improved) bilateral cooperation (asking only for tweaks in the exchange of diplomatic notes on Military Group activities to show greater respect for Ecuadorian sovereignty). His actions were generally pragmatic that year, such as paying the debt. Although he occasionally took a swipe at us (e.g., when TSA searched him at Miami Airport), Correa did not use the U.S. as his regular whipping boy, instead lashing out against the traditional domestic political parties, bankers and other economic elite, and the media.

18. (C) In the foreign policy arena, while Correa clearly wished to reduce dependence on the U.S., he appeared during his first year in office to want to cultivate good relations with countries across the political spectrum. He accepted the assistance Venezuela offered, but chose not to join ALBA at that time. When Iran pressed to open embassies in 2007, he decided on commercial offices. And he repeatedly put off trips to Cuba.

DECIPHERING THE UNDECIPHERABLE

19. (C) We attribute Correa's more radical shift to a combination of some or all of the following, although their relative weight is difficult to gauge:

-- The Iran and Cuba trips and rhetoric, together with the debt default, may be aimed at countering criticism from far left elites and undercutting prospects for a more radical presidential candidate (e.g., former Constituent Assembly president Alberto Acosta).

-- The debt default decision plays to the electorate since it strikes a chord still raw from the late 1990s banking crisis. (In contrast, the Iran and Cuba trips mean little to the large majority of voters who just want a meal on the table and a roof over their heads.)

-- Correa may have been emboldened when almost 64% of the electorate approved the country's new constitution on September 28, 2008.

-- He remains angry at the Colombian government, which he sees as a puppet of the U.S.

-- Correa blames the U.S. for its role in the global financial crisis.

-- He seems to be marginalizing his moderate advisors.

-- Correa may have decided to throw in his lot with Chavez and other anti-American populists. Former Vice FM Jose Valencia explained Correa's behavior to us on December 22 as gravitating toward Chavez's orbit.

WILL THE REAL CORREA PLEASE STAND UP

10. (C) COMMENT: Only time will tell whether Correa's behavior in recent months shows his true colors. Some analysts suggest we will not know for sure until after the April 26 election when the composition of the National Assembly may push him in one direction or another. In the meantime, we are conveying the message in private that Correa's actions will have consequences for his relationship with the new Obama Administration, while avoiding public comments that would be counterproductive. We do not recommend terminating any USG programs that serve our interests since that would only weaken the incentive for Correa to move back into a more pragmatic mode. However, we cut off support for a Department of Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement vetted unit when the Police Commander insisted on a new leader who was not subject to polygraphing, which is required for all vetted unit personnel. We will do the same if any of our other programs lose integrity.

HODGES

=====CABLE ENDS=====